

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 7

Northwest Oregon and Washington's most complete and accurate fishing forecast

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 12th – February 18th, 2010**

Oregon Fisheries Update:



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Willamette Valley/Metro - Spring chinook are being taken almost daily on either the Columbia or Willamette Rivers. Effort has been running high for this early in the season, as excitement grows that the huge run will come to fruition in the coming months. Effort is spread region-wide but with Willamette fish often making a good showing early, effort downstream of St. Helens where Willamette fish often veer off into the Multnomah Channel, success is likely to run higher. Willamette fish also average larger in size than their Columbia bound cousins.

Willamette level and flow was steady earlier this week with the water temperature in the lower river in the upper 40s. Winter steelhead crossing at the Falls is steady as the YTD count approaches 3,000. Sturgeon fishing is yielding many small fish, few keepers. Springers have been landed at Sellwood Bridge with herring a top bait this early in the season.

Redsides are responding to nymphs on the McKenzie from Hayden to Armitage.

Steelheading has been fair but steady on the Clackamas. Try drifting cured eggs to find one. Broodstock steelhead should begin to show in greater force in the coming weeks. An early summer steelhead isn't unheard of either.

A weekend report indicates trees across the Sandy just above Dabney and another downstream of the park. Fishing has been slow to fair.

Northwest – Steelheaders have been challenged by recent low water conditions on the north coast. Effort has been taken place in the lower stretches of most watersheds, with the hope that fresh run fish will be making their way upstream from a recent high tide event.

The Wilson and Nestucca Rivers draw the most interest this time of year but success rates have

been slow in recent days. Only a rare fish is being taken but predicted rainfall is likely going to stimulate a good bite by the weekend. A good showing of wild and broodstock fish is likely if the river rise happens.

The Trask River is also an option, especially for folks willing to explore catch and release opportunities. A rare hatchery stray is taken however.

The Nehalem has fished fair in recent days but remained a bit too high for good catch rates. With such an extensive watershed, the Nehalem is last to clear and fish well.

Despite a good tide series over the weekend, sturgeon were nowhere to be found on Tillamook Bay. It's a sign that keepers may have moved out of the estuary onto a better food source in an adjacent body of water.

Crabbing has picked up in recent days with Netarts and the lower Columbia River fair options for keepers. The predicted rainfall may slow catches but favorable morning tides will occur over the weekend.

Scheduled for trout stocking this week are Alder Lake, Big Creek Reservoirs 1 & 2, Buck Lake, Carter Lake, Clewox Lake, Dune Lake, Elbow Lake, Georgia Lake, Lost Lake (Lane County), Munsel Lake, North Georgia Lake, Olalla Creek Reservoir, Perkins Lake, Siltcoos Lagoon, and Thissel Pond.

Southwest – The tide will be incoming at dawn this weekend but will be of no consequence to boaters as the ocean is forecast to be too rough for launches.

While the Umpqua has remained a consistent winter steelhead fishery, and while the vast majority of winters hooked here are native fish, which must be released, a 23 pounder was landed by a local guide over the past weekend.

Coos River steelheaders have been scoring well with the South Coos most productive. The Millacoma has remained a consistent producer for winter steelhead with jigs effective.

Surf perch fishing has been decent off south coast beaches whenever the ocean has laid down.

Fishing in the Elk and Sixes, good last week through Friday has slowed considerably. Fishing should improve here following this week's rainfall.

Steelheading on the lower Rogue has been slow to fair with plugs most effective for steelhead. The Grants Pass stretch is somewhat more productive than the lower river.

The Chetco River fished well as recently as Monday this week with winter steelhead hookups occurring river-wide. Fishing is expected to be fair until the next freshet. A rough bar may prevent fresh steelhead from entering the river. Seas topping 20 feet are in the forecast for the coming weekend.

Alton Baker Canal is scheduled for planting with hatchery trout.

Eastern – Steelhead are responding to dark patterns on the Deschutes. Fish around Maupin above White River for the best water conditions.

Lake Billy Chinook has been fair for winter kokanee trollers using downriggers to reach deep schools.

The Metolius has been slow to fair.

The Dalles and John Day Pools are producing fine steelhead catches for the trollers that are working these reservoirs. Catch rates as high as 2 steelhead per rod were realized last week by checkers working the Washington side of the river in The Dalles Pool.

SW Washington – Steelheaders were catching fish on the Cowlitz with Blue Creek a top bet. The Lewis and Kalama also remain viable options with the latter producing opportunities for quality broodstock steelhead.

Smelt dippers did very poor on last weekend's Cowlitz River opener. Prospects remain low with poor indicators coming from Columbia mainstem commercial netters.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Effort is on the rise with the recent news that spring Chinook are being caught on the mainstem and lower Willamette River. Trollers working the river downstream of the mouth of the Willamette were reporting fair action working the bottom with herring. Although the water is still cold, fair catches this early in the season is surely a good indicator that we're likely in for a good return of adults. Davis Bar, Frenchmen's Bar (Washington side, just downstream of the mouth of the Willamette and St. Helens were producing some catches last week. Although early fish are certainly available, peak season is still nearly a month away.

Sturgeon anglers continue to struggle downstream of Bonneville Dam. The water is cold and the fish are scattered. Anglers upstream of Bonneville are still reporting good action however and pools upstream of Bonneville (The Dalles & John Day) are also reporting fair catches in the somewhat mild weather.

Steelhead trollers in The Dalles Pool and to a lesser degree the John Day Pool are reporting good catches of steelhead. Many of the fish being landed are wild but the action is as good as 2 fish per rod for boaters working The Dalles Pool (as tallied by WDF&W).

Crabbing in the lower Columbia remains an option with fair catches reported when the weather and tides cooperate.

The Guide's Forecast – Spring Chinook fishermen will be keeping a close eye on catches for the mainstem Columbia. Catch rates are already fair for the amount of anglers plying the waters but state agencies are clearly witnessing an up-tick in effort. Catches will remain modest but dedicated anglers trolling herring near the bottom do stand a fair chance at catching a salmon this time of year. As effort increases, catch rates will flatten somewhat. These early fish seem most aggressive on herring; whether you are trolling or on anchor. Work the water below the mouth of the Willamette or Multnomah Channel. That way, you'll have access to the fish that are destined for the Willamette itself. It's tempting to anchor up on outgoing tide and work Kwikfish. You're better off trolling this time of year, no matter what time of the tide you're fishing. An extreme outgoing tide may be the exception. When this occurs, fish close to the bank.

Forget about sturgeon fishing unless you're targeting your quarry upstream of Bonneville Dam. Keepers won't be coming into the mix in the downstream areas until late April.

Steelheaders reported good action last week but the new low pressure system could dampen the bite this week. Fair numbers of steelhead are still crossing Bonneville Dam and action can continue to be good in the coming weeks.

Don't expect red hot catches of crab in the lower estuary but keepers should be available for much of this week. The tide series has moderated which should improve catches in the coming days.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – A few springers are being taken in the lower Willamette and sturgeon fishing is slow to fair. Regulations are in the pipeline that will close sturgeon fishing from May through July from the Falls to the I-205 Bridge as this stretch has been determined a spawning sanctuary (this stretch will remain open for salmon, steelhead and shad). A cap on the number of sturgeon that may be taken in a calendar year is also likely. The best news is a pending closure of the Oregon City Wall fishery where sub-legal and oversize fish are dropped 40 to 60 feet in order to return them to the river. At the same time, renovation of the west side catwalk is in the works. Stay tuned for more.

Level and flow at the McKenzie River started to increase on Tuesday this week but it should be fishable by the weekend. Cool rain has dropped the water temperature but anglers should still find it in the low 40s.

The North Santiam is predicted to rise about a foot and a half, cresting on Friday this week. It will remain a little high but dropping with Sunday looking like the better window of opportunity for fishing.

Only three more days to catch the short run of the Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show this week. More information here: <http://otshows.com/shows/pnwss/>

The Guide's Forecast – Try trolling the St. Johns area for an early spring Chinook. As many springer enter the Willamette via Multnomah Channel, this can be an even better area to hook up. While most boats are dragging herring, a few have tired back-bouncing bait with good results. Patience is required this early in the season. Sturgeon fishing is another option with keepers available in the lower river. Try around Milwaukie and Sellwood for best results. Take a variety of bait for the best chance of finding what the fish prefer on any given day. Lately, sand shrimp has been a favorite but smelt herring, squid and even worms have taken keepers recently.

A few March Browns are around on the McKenzie and trout are already responding to dry offerings.

With a remarkable number of steelhead over Willamette Falls this season (compared to many previous years), and given that most are bound for the North Santiam, there are good numbers of fish in the river. This should create decent catch-and-release fishing for native steelhead although there are likely a very few early summers around.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Steelheading on the Clackamas slowed this week with only a few fish hooked low on the river. Despite mediocre results, there are still plenty of people trying. The water is low and clear so any precipitation this week will only serve to improve conditions.

Water at the Sandy has been low and clear and, as always, has created scratch fishing. Steelheaders who cover a lot of water, hitting pockets where fish are holding are finding a few but those few have been chrome bright. Spinners seem to be most effective here. It's a crapshoot as to whether rainfall this week will be sufficient to improve conditions here where flow

is contingent upon the effects of the freezing level to a greater degree.

The Guide's Forecast – Rain this week should put some water in Eagle Creek on the Clackamas system as well as cure the clear water blues. Jigs should be effective here although spinners will also tempt steelhead if there is sufficient volume. Try the mainstem Clackamas low on the system to intercept fresh winters which will be entering with a freshet.

The upper Sandy (think Dodge Park) should be most productive this weekend with results improving on any drop in water level. Oxbow has also produced a few this week, however and would be another weekend option, particularly if rain this week puts a little color in the water.

North Coast Fishing Report – First it's too high, not it's too low. Steelheaders on the north coast were complaining of low water for the first time in many weeks. Prior to the low and clear conditions, action was pretty good. Some anglers favor low water tactics but light line and small offerings are required if any level of success is to be expected. Anglers were still working the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers with enthusiasm but after receiving the days reports, excitement waned into disappointment.

We fished the Wilson on Sunday with moderate boat traffic and fair at best results. We had one bite on a plug, landing about an 8-pound hatchery steelhead. For all the boats we talked to, we didn't hear of another fish taken. Sidedrifter's dominated the drift but since we started late, we could have much of the water we wanted to so most fish hadn't seen a plug all day until we got there. Like I mentioned however, we only got 1 take-down, it just happened to stick.

Reports from the Nestucca were slow. Heavy traffic was working the lower stretches with very little to report for success. Hopefully, that will change with the predicted rain.

The Nehalem put out a few fish but effort has been light, mostly due to water levels that were still a bit too high to put anglers in the comfort zone. Anglers should keep in mind that the take-out at Mohler Sand and Gravel isn't open on weekends, you'll have to drift to Roy Creek.

As previously reported, the smaller streams like the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum and Three Rivers are all but over this time of year. Very few fresh hatchery steelhead will be available for the remainder of the season.

Sturgeon anglers reported a drastic downturn in success on Tillamook Bay last week. Despite good tides, action in the west channel and upper bay was non-existent. Good weather brought out the people, the fish just didn't respond.

The weather was nice enough to get some people bottomfishing but reports weren't as great as most would expect. Fair catches of lingcod and some bass were reported out of Depoe Bay. **Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-602-0881)** reported that most of the lings averaged between 22 and 27 inches.

Ocean crabbing remains the best prospect but estuary crabbing in Netarts showed signs of life also but don't expect limits by any stretch of the imagination.

The Guide's Forecast – River forecasts are predicted to take levels back up to steelhead green by Thursday although at the time of this writing, it wasn't coming to fruition. If the north coast doesn't get a shot of rain prior to the weekend, it will be another tough week for anglers to expect any decent results for later returning broodstock fish.

The Nestucca and Wilson will remain the best bets but remember, with low flow, anglers should target the lower stretches of these rivers. Assuming we do get the water that's predicted, it should put the entire watersheds in play for weekend hopefuls. You'll want to be fishing the drop instead of a rise however. Bait works best in the higher flows.

The Nehalem will likely remain too high for good results and other smaller systems will only contain spent hatchery fish. More fresh fish for catch and release fisheries should begin to show later in the month.

A weaker tide series this weekend will not be great for sturgeon but crabbers may wish to take advantage of these tides. The ocean will likely remain closed as big seas are in the forecast.

Central & South Coast Reports – Rough seas and very high swells will keep boats at bay this coming weekend. Too bad, too, as bottom fishing has yielded limits of rockfish and some dandy ling cod out of Newport when the ocean has laid down. Crabbing has been slow with mostly females in offshore pots.

The entire Oregon coast is without restriction for harvest of clams and mussels.

The Alsea River is forecast to crest overnight Friday, February 12th and be on the drop for the weekend. Prospects are fair to good although this is one of those locations that just gets slammed whenever a steelhead is caught.

Prospects are decent for the Siuslaw this weekend where bank access is good for those who are without a drift boat. Expect come company here.

Long-rodders tossing offerings off the South Jetty at Winchester Bay have been caching fair to good numbers of rockfish. This activity can only occur in those brief windows of opportunity when waves don't threaten rock fishers. Steelheading on the mainstem Umpqua has been fair for side-drifters while the South Umpqua has continued to be productive through low water conditions. Rain this week will revitalize this fishery. Expect best results to occur at the forks.

Tenmile Creek has remained fair but steady for winter steelhead.

Crabbers inside Coos Bay have continued to take fair catches but most of the take is red rock crab with few Dungeness showing in nets and traps. The ocean flattened out on Tuesday this week allowing recreational boats to get out for very large lings and good takes of crab.

The Coquille has been fair for steelhead over the past week. It remains to be seen if this week's precipitation triggers any improvement. Cured eggs have been most effective here. The South Coquille has been producing a few fish in low, clear water conditions. Rain this week will improve both water conditions and steelheading prospects.

Steelheading is expected to be worthwhile on the Elk River where rainfall this week will ameliorate the low, clear water here which stalled fishing this week. Fishing for winter steelhead on the Sixes has slowed.

A modest influx of fresh water this week will surely improve conditions on the Rogue where low, clear water has been hampering efforts of winter steelheaders. Following the freshet, Sunday will probably be the best time to hit the lower Rogue with side-drifters and plug-pullers doing best. The Grants Pass stretch, which has continued to provide fair fishing in low water over the past

weekend or so, is expected to fish best. Try bait or small lure side-drifted as bank fishing is not expected to be as productive. Fish below the Applegate River as it the destination for the majority of winter steelhead passing through the middle Rogue. Fish passage will increase over Gold Ray Dam with the freshet but the upper river will remain low due to water control at the dam so results will remain slow.

The Chetco, at 2,480 on the morning of February 11th, had just started to rise with rainfall starting this week. A few steelheaders have been enjoying fair, steady catches by staying upriver in the national forest. The Chetco is expected to crest early Saturday around 5,000 cfs and should fish well thereafter for driftboaters and plunkers alike. Catches here are primarily fin-clipped hatchery fish. Whenever the ocean has allowed access (unlike the coming weekend), offshore crabbing has been good as has bottom fishing for rockfish and ling cod, the latter of which is close to shore now for spawning. In between storm fronts, beaches have produced improving catches of surf perch.

Recently inducted in to the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame was Frank Alvin Moore who is the founder of the Steamboat Inn on the Umpqua. In the ceremony which was held in Hayward, Wisconsin, Jack Williams of Medford, the former Fisheries Program manager for the Bureau of Land Management and chief scientist for Trout Unlimited, was honored with a Special Recognition award.

Admission is free at the Lower Umpqua Flycasters' annual fly fishing exposition to be held at the Highland Elementary School in Reedsport on February 27th from 9 AM to 4 PM.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Pressure has been very light on the Deschutes while steelheading has been fair. This is a great place to test skills while enjoying winter solitude.

The Grande Ronde has been producing steelhead from the launch down to Bogan's but word is out and pressure is increasing. Try jigs or cured eggs under a float. Fly anglers have also been scoring here.

Green Peter is producing a few kokanee but then winter trolling for kokes isn't about numbers; it's about getting out of the house to relax and enjoy the splendor of the location.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report *February 4th – February 18th, 2009*

North Puget Sound

Most marine areas in Puget Sound are open for salmon, but blackmouth fishing has yet to heat up this year. "I've heard reports of anglers reeling in a salmon here and a salmon there, but overall fishing for blackmouth has been slow," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist.

Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) are open for **blackmouth** - resident chinook. Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook.

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is closed to salmon fishing.

In the rivers, **steelhead** fishing continues to be slow as well. Some hatchery steelhead have been reeled in recently at Reiter Ponds on the Skykomish River and at Tokul Creek. There also

have been reports of some wild steelhead in the Pilchuck and Wallace rivers, said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager.

Leland reminds anglers that the Green River is closed to fishing from the 1st Ave. South Bridge upstream to the Tacoma Headworks Dam, and the Skagit and Sauk rivers close Feb. 16. With low steelhead returns expected back to those rivers, the emergency closures are necessary to protect wild steelhead, Leland said.

Meanwhile, a portion of the North Fork Nooksack River re-opened Feb. 2.

Details on all of these emergency rules can be found on WDFW's fishing regulation website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Freshwater anglers looking for a change of pace might want to try fishing for **cutthroat** trout in Lake Washington. The daily limit is five trout, but rainbow trout measuring more than 20 inches and steelhead must be released.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Several new areas of Puget Sound are opening to blackmouth fishing, more wild steelhead are moving into coastal rivers and another razor clam dig is tentatively scheduled for later this month.

"**Blackmouth** fishing has been pretty slow around the Sound, but these new areas could be a different story," said Steve Thiesfeld, a WDFW fish biologist. He was talking about marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal), both of which opened to fishing for resident chinook salmon Feb. 1.

Starting Feb. 13, anglers will also be able to fish for blackmouth in marine areas 5 and 6 on the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

There is a daily limit of one chinook, measuring at least 22 inches, in all of those areas, although anglers fishing for blackmouth in Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) can keep two fish per day. Marine Area 10 (Seattle-Bremerton) closed for blackmouth fishing Jan. 31.

Rather fish for **steelhead** ? This is the time of year when wild steelhead begin moving into coastal rivers in large numbers and - as of Feb. 1 - most of those rivers were in good shape for fishing, said Randy Cooper, another WDFW fish biologist.

"Fishing has been pretty good on the lower Hoh River, although the Sol Duc has been drawing the largest number of anglers," Cooper said. "Hatchery steelhead are clearly winding down, but the fishery for wild fish should keep improving through the month."

Anglers may retain one wild steelhead per license year on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. On all other rivers, anglers may retain only hatchery-reared steelhead marked with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar. Specific rules for each river are described in the 2009-10 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

WDFW has tentatively scheduled an evening **razor clam** dig at several ocean beaches in late February, pending the results of marine toxin tests. Shellfish managers are optimistic that elevated levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) - which disqualified Long Beach from a dig in late January - will have dissipated by then.

"The toxin appears to have moved up the coast from Oregon, where it has cleared up enough to open beaches for razor clam digging," said Dan Ayes, WDFW coastal shellfish coordinator.

"That's a good sign, but it's still important that diggers here wait for a final announcement on the opening before they hit the beach."

Approved digging days in February for specific beaches are shown below, along with evening low tides:

- Friday, Feb. 26, (4:49 p.m., -0.7) Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Saturday, Feb. 27, (5:34 p.m., -0.9) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Sunday, Feb. 28, (6:16 p.m., -0.8) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch

Harvesters may take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 taken, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's limit must be kept in a separate container. All diggers must have an applicable 2009-10 fishing license to dig razor clams on any beach. A license is required for anyone age 15 or older.

Anglers can buy a combination license or an annual shellfish/seaweed license. Also available are razor-clam only licenses in annual or three-day only versions. Descriptions of the various licensing options are available on the WDFW website at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>. A list of state license vendors is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/licensing/vendors/>.

Southwest Washington

The first **spring chinook salmon** of the year was caught Feb. 1 in the Columbia River off Davis Bar, west of Vancouver. The fish reportedly took a cutplug herring on a "downhill" troll with the current.

So began the 2010 spring chinook fishery, which could promise to be one of the best on record. With over 550,000 springers predicted to return to the Columbia River this year, anglers are already prospecting for early arrivals.

Columbia River anglers may retain hatchery-reared spring chinook under last year's rules until fishery managers from Washington and Oregon meet to establish new fishing seasons for the remainder of 2010. That meeting, which is open to the public, is set to begin at 10 a.m. Feb. 18 in Oregon City, 211 Tumwater Dr.

But since the bulk of the spring chinook run isn't expected to arrive until mid-March, anglers may want to consider some other options between now and then:

- **Winter steelhead:** Anglers fishing The Dalles Pool have been averaging one to 1.5 steelhead per rod, although 70 percent of the fish were wild and had to be released. Meanwhile, late-run winter steelhead are beginning to move toward the hatcheries on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers where they were raised. The fishery for late-run fish tends to peak in late February and early March, although some late-run steelhead are already beginning to show up in the catch.
- **White sturgeon:** Catch rates of legal-size sturgeon have picked up above Bonneville Dam in recent days, likely triggered by warming water temperatures. Sturgeon fishing in the lower river remains slow, but that could change if smelt return to the Cowlitz River in greater numbers than expected. Sturgeon regulations for all areas of the lower Columbia River listed in the Fishing in Washington rule pamphlet will remain in effect through

February. New seasons will be set by fishery managers from Washington and Oregon at a public meeting scheduled Feb. 18 in Oregon City, Ore.

- **Smelt:** Projecting another poor return, WDFW is limiting the Cowlitz River sport fishery for smelt to four days this winter. The Cowlitz will be open for smelt dipping Feb. 6, 13, 20 and 27, between 7 a.m. and 3 p.m. with a 10-pound daily limit. Sport fishing for smelt on the mainstem Columbia River opened seven days per week, 24-hours day, starting Jan. 1, although anglers catch very few fish there. Commercial boats on the Columbia landed about 2,700 pounds of smelt in January, but the catch dropped off during the last few days of fishing.
- **Trout:** While nothing is certain, anglers have a pretty good chance of catching trout - some averaging eight pounds - in lakes planted by WDFW during the winter months. At Klineline Pond, 106 bank anglers caught and kept 123 catchable-size rainbows and 10 broodstock rainbows and released another 106 catchables and three brooders during the last week of January. During that week, Klineline was stocked with 4,500 catchables, Lake Sacajawea in Longview got 3,000 catchables and Battleground Lake got 1,500 catchable, plus 150 surplus hatchery steelhead averaging eight pounds each. In addition, a couple of lakes in the gorge (Rowland Lake near Lyle and Spearfish Lake near Dallesport) got a total of nearly 100 broodstock rainbows averaging four pounds each.
- **Razor clams:** WDFW has tentatively scheduled an evening razor clam dig at Long Beach and several ocean beaches in late February. If toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat, Long Beach will open for digging Feb. 27-28 after noon both days. (See the South Sound/Olympic Peninsula report for digs scheduled at other beaches.) Shellfish managers are optimistic that the elevated levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) - which disqualified Long Beach from a dig in late January - will have dissipated by then. "But it's important that diggers wait for a final announcement on the opening before they hit the beach," said Dan Ayes, WDFW coastal shellfish coordinator.

During the last week in January, Tacoma Power recovered 44 winter-run steelhead, five coho adults and one jack during five days of operation at the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery separator. Also that week, Tacoma Power employees released five winter-run steelhead into the Tilton River at Gust Backstrom Park in Morton and 11 winter-run steelhead and one coho jack into Lake Scanewa behind Cowlitz Falls Dam.

Eastern Washington

Ice on lakes throughout most of the region remains questionable since daytime temperatures have been above 40 degrees. Bill Baker, WDFW northeast district fish biologist, said the two winter-season **rainbow trout** lakes - Williams and Hatch lakes in Stevens County near Colville - remain iced over and a few folks are fishing through the ice. But ice fishing is definitely "at your own risk," he said. Baker encourages anglers to check WDFW's ice fishing safety information at http://wdfw.wa.gov/factsheets/ice_fishing.htm.

Chris Donley, WDFW central district fish biologist, said there is open water at the northeast end of Sprague Lake, and anglers continue to catch the lake's big **rainbow trout**. Year-round Eloika Lake in north Spokane County has mostly open water for anglers.

Year-round Rock Lake in Whitman County rarely freezes up completely and has been providing good open-water fishing for rainbow and **brown trout**. "But the best bet right now is still Lake Roosevelt," Donley said. "The rainbow trout and **kokanee** fishing there is very good, especially on the south end."

Steelhead fishing is also good in the Snake River drainage, especially on the tributaries like the Grand Ronde, Touchet, Tucannon, and Walla Walla. When water levels drop and the water clears, steelhead are harder to catch. But the fish are there, so persistent anglers can be successful. Anglers fishing the system can retain hatchery steelhead, but are required to release all wild fish. See the details in the rules pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Northcentral Washington

WDFW fish biologist Matt Polacek recommends year-round Banks Lake in Grant County for good fishing opportunities for **rainbow trout** and **kokanee**. "The main lake is ice free," he said, "but a small group of anglers are also catching **whitefish** and **perch** through the ice on the south end of Banks Lake."

Warmer weather has opened up previously iced-over sections of the Methow and Okanogan rivers, providing some good winter **steelhead** fishing. WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Twisp reports catch rates of one fish for every six to eight hours of fishing for the last two weeks.

"Jig and bobber setups for the gear fishermen, as well as smaller flies under float indicators for the fly fishermen, have all been producing catches of steelhead," Jateff said.

Jateff reminds steelheaders that both the Okanogan and the Methow are under selective gear rules and no bait is allowed. Retention of hatchery-origin fish with clipped adipose fins is mandatory, up to the daily limit of four. Anglers should make sure to gain permission before crossing private property alongside both of these rivers.

Meanwhile, ice fishing opportunities on Okanogan County lakes has been reduced due to warming temperatures. "The ice in some areas appears to be unstable," he said. "However, Patterson Lake in the Winthrop area is still producing catches of **yellow perch**, with a few rainbows mixed in. There is no minimum size and no daily limit on yellow perch in Patterson because we actually want anglers to remove as many as possible."

For information on ice-fishing safety, see http://wdfw.wa.gov/factsheets/ice_fishing.htm.

The Methow River is open to **whitefish** from Gold Creek upstream to the falls above Brush Creek and the Chewuch River from the mouth to the Pasayten Wilderness boundary. The Similkameen River is open from the mouth to the Canadian border. Jateff notes those fishing for whitefish in areas that are currently open for steelhead must use selective gear (single barbless lures and flies, no bait allowed).

Southcentral Washington

Three out of 14 boat anglers fishing the John Day Pool on the Columbia River took home a legal-size sturgeon, according to a creel survey conducted the last week of January. "Legal-size sturgeon must measure between 43 and 54 inches in fork length," said Paul Hoffarth, a WDFW fish biologist. "New regulations went into effect last year changing how sturgeon are measured from total length to fork length. Fork length is defined as the distance from the tip of the nose to the middle of the fork in the tail, and that's the length you record on your catch record card, even if the card has the old 'total length' column."

Hoffarth notes the sturgeon fishery in this area will remain open until the quota is reached and closure announced.

"**Walleye** fishing in the Tri-Cities area and upstream in the Snake River is beginning to pick up," Hoffarth said. "Anglers are reporting fair catches below and above McNary Dam and in the Snake River below Ice Harbor and Little Goose dams."

Hoffarth says **steelhead** fishing in the district has been spotty this winter but should pick up in late February and early March.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Got a question, story to tell or information to share? Shoot us an Email!

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Outrageous! - Is public testimony ever requested on an issue not already decided? One wonders following this article. The truth behind the Waldo Lake decision:

http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2010/02/the_truth_behind_the_waldo_lak.html

Be careful out there - Get-tough law considered too tough:

<http://www.mailtribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100211/LIFE/2110304/-1/OREGONOUTDOORS>

GOOD LUCK!